



Scripture Reading: Mark 8:27-38

Top Dog?

Yesterday, my wife and I took our dog, Chip, to see our friends' new puppy, Shabby. The two dogs walked and played together, the little one pouncing and nipping, climbing and tumbling, all over Chip.

Chip was wonderful, patient, and playful. He was also in charge. He was the teacher showing Shabby how to walk and play and get along with the other dogs and people in their lives. The picture above might give the impression that the puppy was "top dog," but there was never any doubt about how things really worked and who was ultimately in control.

In Mark 8:27-38, the Bible passage Sunday's sermon will be focusing on, Jesus' disciple, Peter, seems to forget momentarily who's in charge, who's teaching and following whom. In the passage, Peter names Jesus as the Messiah, showing that he is beginning to understand just who Jesus really is. But then Peter gets it all wrong when Jesus tells his disciples that the Son of Man, the title Jesus often uses for the Messiah, must suffer, be rejected, die, and rise again on the third day. Peter forgets who's in charge, who is the teacher, who is the leader.

"And Peter took him [Jesus] aside and began to rebuke him," the Gospel writer tells us. You've got to give Peter credit, he never does anything half-heartedly. He's all in, right or wrong. And in this case, he's wrong. "But turning and looking at his disciples, Jesus rebuked him [Peter] and said, "Get behind me, Satan! For you are setting your mind not on divine things, but on human things." Or as the *NLT* version puts it, "You are seeing things merely from a human point of view, not from God's."

Never in a million years, or in ten thousand or in however many we human beings have been around, would we think the pathway to success, to saving our lives, would be through losing our lives, through death. Yet, that is precisely what Jesus is saying. The human point of view will never lead you to this conclusion, but if you really understand who I am, who's in charge, who is the Messiah, then come with me, trust me, follow me. "If any want to be my followers," Jesus goes on to say, "let them deny themselves and take up their cross, and follow me."

The Message puts verses 34-37 this way: "Anyone who intends to come with me has to let me lead. You're not in the driver's seat; I am. Don't run from suffering; embrace it. Follow me and I'll show you how. Self-help is no help at all. Self-sacrifice is the way, my way, to saving yourself, your true self. What good would it do to get everything you want and lose you, the real you? What could you ever trade your soul for?"

We've got to decide, once and for all, and every day of our lives, who we really believe is the Messiah, the One who knows best, who is, yes, in so many words, "Top Dog" in our lives and world. And if, like Peter, your answer is Jesus, then put him first, get behind him and follow him, his way, his teaching, his guidance. Walking with him, we will learn how to walk and play and get along with others in the joyful, loving, life-giving ways that God in God's great wisdom dreams and desires for us to enjoy

Prayer:

Lord Jesus, Messiah, be my Leader, my Teacher, my Lord. Forgive me for sticking so tenaciously to my own ways of thinking and acting. By your grace, let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable to you, and enable me to follow and serve you, according to your wise leading. Amen.

Something(s) to try:

- Memorize this week's memory verse.
- Take time to try praying the text of the week using Lectio Divina - click the website link below for more details.
- Practice denying yourself and taking up your cross this week by choosing not to do something you enjoy doing and doing something to serve someone else instead. This might be as simple as passing up a five dollar cup of coffee and donating or using the money to help others. Be creative and try something(s)!

Memory/Meditation Verse: He called the crowd with his disciples, and said to them, "If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me." Mark 8:34